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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CASA OF COOK COUNTY: REINVENTING THE CULTURE OF FOSTER CARE
FOR HUNDREDS OF CHILDREN EVERY YEAR**

CHICAGO, IL (Sept. 6, 2019) — For 33 years, Court Appointed Special Advocates of Cook County has been the eyes and ears of the court. What started as an independent, nonprofit agency by Juvenile Court Judge David Soukup of Seattle, Wash., has now expanded to 31 different programs across Illinois and 1,000 total programs nationwide. Each CASA program accomplishes what they do by training everyday volunteers, who serve in court as advocates, ensuring foster care children receive the best opportunities available. In the past three decades, CASA of Cook County has served more than 12,000 Illinois minors.

Former CASA Supervisor Brianne Swan said, “Our goal is to serve every child because just as in all of the other Illinois counties, Chicago’s foster care children deserve to be heard too.”

What sets the CASA program apart from other foster care advocates, such as caseworkers or child welfare professionals, is that each volunteer works with no more than one or two cases at a time.

Because court rooms are typically closed to outside parties, CASA of Cook County has a real opportunity to work with underserved children, primarily African American males ages 6-11 years.

“I want every kid to find a family member,” said Cook County Circuit Judge Hon. Patricia Martin, presiding judge of the child protection division. “But if I’m not fortunate enough to have a family member, my next thing is CASA advocates. They are my rock for my kids.”

In the last year, CASA of Cook County reported 325 cases with:

- 62 closed cases, meaning achieved permanency
- 47% reunited with families
- 11% placed with a relative
- 10% permanently adopted
- 6% transferred, 3% aged out

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CASA of Cook County not only works to improve the foster care system, but also the everyday lives of foster care children. By partnering with various organizations such as the Toy Industry Foundation, partnerships typically result in kid-friendly events, fundraising and/or gift giving.

Chicago-native Brandon Johnson is just one of the many success stories of CASA Advocates. Growing up in Englewood, Johnson is the youngest of his six siblings and was placed into foster care. Today, Johnson is a successful Cook. He says that CASA played a huge role in his development, opening doors for him he never knew were there.

The majority of CASA of Cook County's revenue comes from special events, bringing in 37%. The organization also receives foundation grants, government funding and individual and corporate contributions. 71% of their revenue is spent toward program funding.

According to CASA of Cook County's Board President Lana Vukovljak and Executive Director Bonita Carr, individual and corporate donations have increased CASA of Cook County's reach by 6% in the last year alone.

With approximately 5,700 children in the Cook County foster care system, 491 are currently paired with a CASA of Cook County advocate. However, CASA of Cook County is constantly looking to expand by scouting for new volunteers, donors and partnerships.

"The future of our organization is filled with tremendous opportunities...We remain committed to enhancing our operations, expanding our donor base and increasing our ability to touch as many lives as possible...." Vukovljak and Carr said.

To learn more, visit <https://casacookcounty.org/> or follow CASA of Cook County on Facebook and Twitter at CASAofCookCo and on Instagram at CASAofCookCounty.

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